

RITUAL STRUCTURE

is worshipped. Incense is burnt by putting *ghee* (clarified butter) 776
on a fire in front of Vishnu's image. Two red threads are tied by
the Brahmin, first to the arms of the image, and a little later, after
being removed therefrom, to his own arm.

Petramasa. The last day of the dark fortnight in the month of 761 •
Bhadrapada is dedicated to ceremonies in honour of the ancestors 773
and the deceased members of the household. In fact the whole
fortnight preceding this day is occupied by this activity, for water
must be offered to the dead on the *tithi* (the lunar day correspond-
ing to that of their death). Among the higher castes, if the family
can afford it, the Brahmin is invited to officiate at these rites.
Those who cannot afford it, and people of the lower castes,
manage it themselves. On the Petramasa day itself cooked rice,
curds and several other preparations are offered to the deceased
members of the lineage. Gifts of money, grain and vegetables are
made to the Brahmin and the Jangam.

If there was a death in the family in the preceding year, during
the Petramasa fortnight on the lunar day of death, an elaborate
rite is performed to call home the spirit of the deceased and
lodge it with other ancestor-spirits in one corner of the house.
For these rites different branches of a family gather together
under one main roof.

The Malas and Madigas as well as Vaddars and Erkalas do
not have an elaborate observance. However, the first two make
small gifts of money to the Jangam in honour of their dead, if the
Jangam visits their houses.

Dasara. This festival is observed in the village both individually 796
and collectively. All Hindus bath early in the morning. The
Brahmin and the Komti worship a bunch of *shami* (*Prosopis spicigera*)
leaves along with the images of gods; others worship only the
deities. Observed on the tenth day of Ashvina, Dasara is regarded
as a non-vegetarian festival. With the exception of Brahmins
and Komtis, who are vegetarians, the other non-vegetarian castes
make it a point to cook some meat dish on this day. At midday
people worship the gods in their houses.

In the afternoon the Brahmin visits the Deshmukh's house, and
worships a bunch of *shami* leaves and the headman's ancestral
weapons. In the meantime a flag is hoisted on the central flag post
near the police station. Madigas beat their drums and people
start collecting. When all the responsible village elders assemble

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595 investigations. Their social system and usage permit divorce, and
 586 clauses pertaining to alimony are embodied in the written marriage contract. In actual practice, in all cases of desertion and 'running away' these conditions are not adhered to very strictly, and compensation when paid is substantially less than the figure mentioned
 585 in the contract. As pointed out earlier the marriage rites are conducted by the *kazi*, who is invited from the city for this purpose.

761 *Death.* Both Hindus and Muslims understand the physiological causes of death. It is generally attributed to natural causes, such as disease or old age; but in all cases where the circumstances or manner of death are unusual it is attributed to supernatural factors, such as wrath of gods and ancestor-spirits, witchcraft and black magic.

764 Among all the Hindu castes, the dead children are buried. The Brahmin and the Komti as a rule cremate their dead, except in cases of death from snake-bite and smallpox. Among the other higher castes both cremation and burial are practised. It is usual to cremate the aged as well as the rich and the influential. In the lower castes such as the Sakali, the Mangali and the Erkala, as well as among the untouchable Malas and Madigas, burial is more common. Soon after a death, word is sent round to relations and friends in the village and also in the neighbouring villages. The corpse is washed, clothed and tied on to a wooden or bamboo bier. It is covered with a new cloth, and decorated with flowers. If the family can afford it Madigas are called to play their musical instruments, which they do walking at the head of the procession. The bier is carried by four people on their shoulders. As they proceed slowly towards the graveyard or the cremation ground, people keep on repeating some solemn slogans, such as 'the name of God alone is true' or 'be truthful and your salvation will be assured'. When a person is to be cremated, his or her son, or in the absence of a son a younger brother or some other near kin, carries an earthen pot with fire in it. Midway between the house and the burial ground the bier is placed on the earth for a few minutes' 'rest', and then carried on. Before putting it on the funeral pyre or in the grave, the son, or a near relation of the deceased, goes round the pyre (or grave) three times sprinkling water all around it. The body is then put on the pyre with the bier, or is taken from it and put in the grave. A near kinsman sets fire to the pyre, or

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5. RELIGION IN DISEASE AND DIFFICULTY

In the two preceding sections an attempt has been made to present the ritual cycle of the community covering firstly the festivals and ceremonies within a normal calendar year, and secondly, the rites and observances concerning the major crises of life. These cycles are rigidly observed, as their observance constitutes the *dharma* or the appropriate way of life, and leads to the prosperity and well-being of the family as well as to a desirable future for the individual after death. With the exception of these festivals, under normal conditions of life, there is very little spiritual or devotional activity in the community. But persistent difficulties, uncommon diseases, and frequent deaths turn the people's thoughts to supernatural factors; events are interpreted in terms of supernatural interferences, and are sought to be remedied by magico-religious procedures.

Most of the common diseases are interpreted as a 'fault in the physical system', and are treated with herbal medicines or modern drugs obtained from the dispensary. Common colds, headaches, fever, stomach-ache, scabies, gonorrhoea and syphilis are regarded as natural diseases, and an effort is made to cure them with medicines. But persistent headaches, intermittent fevers, continued stomach disorders, rickets and other wasting diseases among children, menstrual troubles, repeated abortions, etc., are attributed to supernatural forces. In all such cases medicinal cures as well as propitiation of the 'unseen powers' are attempted simultaneously. Similarly, such calamities as the failure of crops, total blindness, repeated failures in undertakings, deaths of children in quick succession and too many deaths in the family within a short time are taken to indicate 'misfortune' and 'the handiwork of malevolent supernatural forces'. Smallpox, cholera and plague are always attributed to the wrath of various goddesses. For these diseases worship is regarded as the only remedy; and no medicines are administered to the patients.

What are the major factors that cause these difficulties, distresses and deaths? In the village community they are attributed to one or more of the following:

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| (i) The wrath of ancestor-spirits. | (ii) Unfavourable stars. |
| (iii) Ghosts and spirits. | (iv) The wrath of gods. |
| (v) Black magic and witchcraft. | |